

# Olympic Torch Gets a Hand at White House: Torch Passes Through To Applause and Tears

By Denis Collins Washington Post Staff Writer

*The Washington Post* (1974-); May 15, 1984; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post

pg. A1

## TORCH LIGHTING



President Reagan stands by as Special Olympics athlete Charlette Pearson and Olympian Kurt Thomas momentari-

ly fail in attempt to light the Olympic flame at a ceremony on the south lawn of the White House. Story on Page D1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

# Olympic Torch Gets a Hand at White House

By Denis Collins  
Washington Post Staff Writer

A funny thing happened to the Olympic flame yesterday on its way from Greece to Los Angeles and this summer's Olympic Games. A combustion problem left President Ronald Reagan momentarily holding the torch on the south lawn of the White House.

When former Olympic gymnast Kurt Thomas had trouble transferring the flame from his torch to the one carried by Special Olympian Charlotte Pearson, he handed his propane-fueled torch to Reagan while he adjusted Pearson's, which he lit on the third attempt. The unplanned political intervention seemed appropriate to these Games, which are more than two months away but already buffeted by the withdrawal of seven countries.

"Athletes and Olympic officials from all countries will find a warm welcome in Los Angeles and will be treated

equally and without discrimination," said Reagan in response to charges by the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries that their athletes would be in danger in Los Angeles. "We will fulfill our responsibilities."

Both the Games and the 9,000-



mile torch relay through 33 states and the District of Columbia have created international controversy. The Greek keepers of the Olympic flame tried to deny U.S. Olympic officials access to it because of their objection to the selling of individual legs of the U.S. relay for \$3,000 a kilometer.

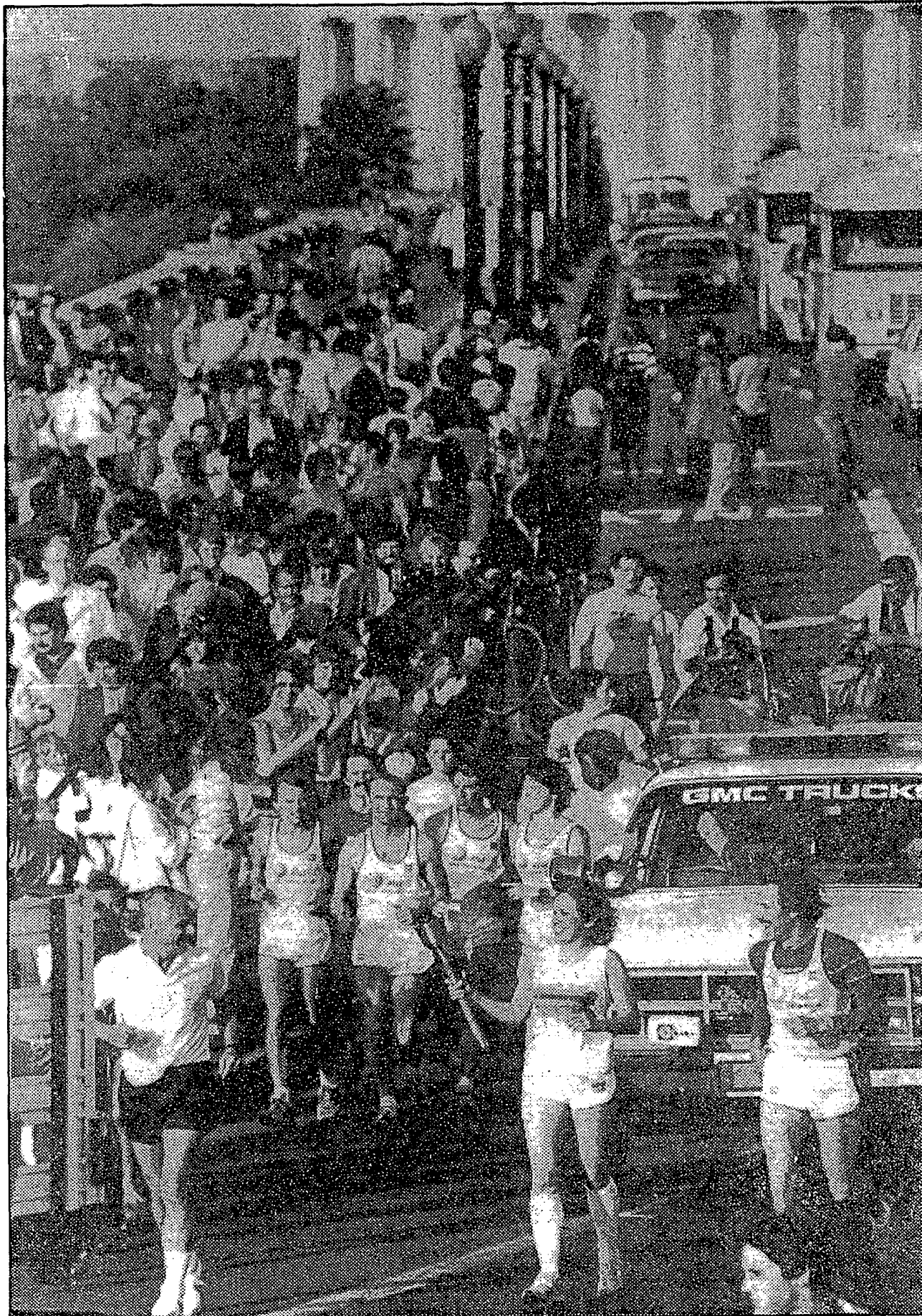
But yesterday, as the torch was carried by dozens of runners from Aberdeen, Md., to Fairfax, thoughts of international disputes were overwhelmed by local enthusiasm.

"You see the Olympic flame on TV, but you never think you'll get to see it in person. Especially not in your hometown," said Linda Hull, who was waiting in a crowd of hundreds at the harbor in Annapolis to see the flame passed in a brief ceremony.

Robin Woolford brought the torch to the harbor and tears to the eyes of those in the crowd who knew him. Nine years ago the 28-year-old was shot in the neck and paralyzed during a robbery at an Annapolis dry cleaners.

"The doctors told my parents I wouldn't last 'til morning. I've been surprising them ever since," said Woolford, who walks with difficulty. Asked what he was thinking during his one-kilometer torch trek, he answered, "I was thinking, 'Don't fall. Don't fall.' I tripped in the office the other day and skinned my elbow. I said to myself, 'I hope this is my fall for the week.'"

See **TORCH**, D3, Col. 3



By Gary A. Cameron—The Washington Post  
**Jeannette Chambers of Falls Church, cheered by onlookers, carries torch across Memorial Bridge.**

Blocked due to copyright.  
See full page image or  
microfilm.

United Press International

**Rep. Mel Levine (D-Calif.) carries Olympic torch up street near Capitol.**

# *Torch Passes Through To Applause and Tears*

## **TORCH, From D1**

Fourteen runners in Annapolis paid \$3,000, or were sponsored for that amount, to run a kilometer. Among them was 74-year-old Elery Clark Jr., a retired cross-country and track coach at the U.S. Naval Academy. He wore two first place Olympic medals around his neck, won by his father in the Athens Games of 1896.

"In those days they gave silver medals for first place and bronze for second. For third place, you got a handshake from King George of Greece," said Clark, whose daughter Vicky Waidner sponsored his kilometer. "We're a sentimental family. She knew I wanted to run the thing in my father's memory."

Four thousand of the 12,000 kilometers were "sold" by the Los Angeles Olympic Committee to celebrities such as O.J. Simpson and Jane Fonda. Bobby Beathard, the general manager of the Washington Redskins, will run a kilometer through Fairfax County this morning.

The majority of the relay, however, will be run by volunteers employed by AT&T, which is the main sponsor of the relay. Each week, a new cadre of 16 runners alternate

carrying the torch. Individual runners cover about eight miles per day.

"The hours are long, but it's worth it," said Dick Fuller, 44, a New Jersey man who waited in a van on Rte. 50 yesterday for his next relay leg. "We get people asking for our autograph. Kids really think that we're important."

More than kids thought this relay was important yesterday. Many Rte. 50 overpasses between Annapolis and Washington were crowded with spectators, as was New York Avenue.

"It was great, people were shouting and cheering, 'U.S.A., U.S.A.,'" said Frank Maio, 48, a computer technician from Forestville, Md., who was sponsored for a kilometer run down New York Avenue by the Washington Bullets after his name was picked in a drawing. "I don't think my feet touched the ground."

Individuals who paid to run a kilometer were allowed to keep their torches as souvenirs. Janet Cook of Pennsylvania and her sister Carolyn Grundy of Clarksburg, Md., already had plans for the torch they shared on a kilometer run through the District.

"Every year we're going to have a torch lighting party and celebrate," said Grundy.